



# LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

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## HOW CAN LIBRARIES BEST SERVE LABOR?

### Report of a Panel Discussion at Los Angeles

The meeting in Los Angeles was a huge success - qualitatively if not quantitatively. The audience of between sixty-five and seventy-five was as large as I had expected but not as large as I had hoped. Our meeting was held on Wednesday, June 24, at 8:30 p.m., after the only free afternoon of the Conference. Naturally, many people who went away for the afternoon did not return for the meetings scheduled for that evening. Those who did attend, however, were very vocal in their expressions of satisfaction about the content of the meeting. I am sure that those who participated in the program were as pleased as I was at the audience response.

The program consisted of a panel discussion on various ways that libraries can give service to labor.

Since Dorothy Oko was on her way to Europe, her well-planned paper on service through a separate department, servicing only labor, was read by Leona Durkes, supervisor of Branch Reference Services, New York Public Library.

Mrs. Oko emphasized three points for consideration in determining the kind of service: The community, the library, and the person. She felt that a special labor service should be attempted only in a community where there are a variety of unions, large and small, with active programs. A community in which there is just one large union or where the unions are not active will not lend itself to this kind of service.

Mrs. Oko maintained that the most important factor is the person. To be successful, he or she must be "labor-group-minded", not just "group-minded", must be conscious of the distinction between "workers education" and "adult education," must be willing to make many personal contacts, and must not be tied to a rigid schedule. (Mrs. Oko's paper appears in this issue).

Ida Goshkin, formerly a member of this Joint Committee, was the next speaker of the panel. Miss Goshkin is returning to her position as chief of Group Service

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at the Akron Public Library after two years as Director of Training for the ALA American Heritage Project.

She spoke of group service as a whole and how it can be used to coordinate all adult education activities of the library. Service is given to all groups, those that come to the library and those to which the library goes. Group Service helps in program planning, acts as a speakers' bureau, helps discussion leaders, maintains a film collection, plans exhibits, etc. It also cooperates with the Business and Labor Reference Service.

The Department of Group Service at Akron informs labor about library services available and keeps the library informed about labor's needs. Servicing labor through group service, Miss Goshkin said, is more economical for the small or medium sized library, and, since it offers the same service to all groups, the library cannot be criticized for its service to labor.

Dorothy Bendix, past chairman of the Joint Committee, was the last librarian member of the panel. Miss Bendix is assistant to the Home Reading Service director of the Detroit Public Library but, since she was formerly in charge of the work with labor at the Newark Public Library, she told how that work had been developed. In Newark, instead of a group service department, the work is done through the Social Science Division. Starting out as a labor alcove and a book review service to a labor paper, the Division developed a special publication, Labor in Print, exhibits, service to workers' education groups and institutes, and book deposits in union halls. Books are selected through this special service but the distribution is handled by the Extension Department. Miss Bendix feels that if the service had been combined with the Business Library it would have been handicapped since, for many years, the Business Library has made a direct appeal to business groups.

#### LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

This newsletter is issued by the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups of the American Library Association, the American Federation of Labor, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Contributions of news and articles are welcomed by the editor.

She agreed with Mrs. Oke that much of the success of this service to labor depends on the staff member selected to do the work. Unfortunately, however, when this service is tied with one individual, the service is frequently discontinued when this person leaves the library. This has been true in several instances.

After hearing these discussions of possible means of service as told by three librarians, the audience was privileged to hear from someone who is interested in this problem from the other side of the desk - the labor educator. Ruth Miller, who also participated in the panel, is educational director of the Los Angeles Joint Board, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, CIO.

She realizes that librarians are interested in increasing the number of library readers. A librarian's special interest in service to labor is either because of an identification on the part of the librarian with labor or a desire to reach and service all groups in the community. If libraries want to service labor, they must recognize that the needs of labor groups must be determined, that there is a wide variance in educational background of union members, and that there is a wide range of subject interest. Labor educators are anxious that libraries have available the materials published by labor organizations as well as other publications of particular interest to labor.

Librarians should work with and through educational directors, when possible, through education committees, and through local officers, notifying them about services and materials available. Notices should be posted in union halls and librarians should ask for the privilege of appearing before union meetings. This appearance will help to overcome the feeling on the part of many members of labor groups that librarians and libraries are formidable and unsympathetic. The recognition that the problem exists, Miss Miller says, is the first step toward overcoming it.

After questions and discussion from the floor, four visiting labor librarians from Austria were introduced: Anna Maria Praschl, chief librarian for the Chamber of Labor in Linz; Elizabeth Stolzenthaller, library specialist in the Education Section of the Union of Municipal Employees of Vienna; Mrs. Karl Fuerboeck, legal specialist in the Home Division of the Ministry of Social Administration and chief librarian of the Ministry's Employees' Library; and Kurt Link, library section manager for the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions. Mr. Link explained the kinds of libraries that this group represents - libraries organized and supported entirely by the Austrian labor movement and frequently the only library available to the public in the community.

The audience stayed on to question our visitors and the panel members and to express their appreciation for the very informative and interesting meeting.

--Reported by Ruth Shapiro,  
Milwaukee Public Library

TO START OR NOT TO START A SEPARATE SERVICE TO LABOR?

By Mrs. Dorothy Kuhn Oko, New York Public Library

There are two things that need saying before I discuss the question of a separate service to labor in the public library. The first is that I am indeed sorry not to be on hand to talk about this personally instead of having to put the matter into the formal framework of a "paper." The second is that I recognize the handicap I labor under as a librarian in one of the largest public libraries serving the largest city in the country. By handicap, I refer to my audience's reaction not to my work. You are all thinking "New York is a special situation." I know that to a large extent this is true but I could make a good case for its not being so entirely "special" if I were here to argue with you. Or I might not need to argue the matter, if I could convince you that I am far from believing that all libraries should be running services for trade unions, or that all libraries should be running a separate service. It is my belief that there is no one right way to service labor; but that every situation demands a different approach and a different procedure.

The kind of service that is set up depends primarily on three factors: first the community, second the library and third the person. I put the community first because I think a special service for labor can thrive only where there are a variety of unions, both large and small, with reasonably active programs of one kind or another. Thus, I question how much of a program can or should be run in a town of one very large union or in a town where for one reason or another the unions are relatively inactive. As for the kind of library in which a special service can and should be organized, I would say this does not depend on size alone. It may be that the library is so departmentalized that a coordinated program would be impossible; or it may be one in which the adult education program is just getting underway; or in which a group service project is already reaching out into the community. All of these things need not preclude working with labor, but they might make it impractical to attempt a separate trade union service. But our third factor, the person, may make all the difference in how such a service is set up and developed. If she or he is "labor-group minded" and not just "group-minded", if she is conscious of the distinction between "workers' education" and "adult education," if she is not tied down to a rigid schedule but can make personal contacts, she can soon develop a very active service for labor in almost any fair-sized community with almost any modern forward-looking library as the base of operation.

Although this may sound like a reversal of my first position, it is not. Rather it is just another way of saying that this program, as any other sound library program, must be based on the actualities of the situation and must grow from there. These actualities must be carefully measured and the program tailored to fit. This is true whether the program is run by one part-time librarian or by a full time staff of two or three.

The resources of the library should be the first object of this examination. If there is a special division of economics or social sciences, it is important to find out whether it possesses an adequate stock of simpler books on subjects of concern to labor. It will help if two or more copies of these are available for circulation among labor groups. What techniques have been worked out for lending small collections to special groups in the community and what funds might be available if extra materials should be needed. These are some of the questions



to be investigated. Further, if there is an active adult education program what does it include? Does it include readers' advisory services, issuing of book lists, discussion programs? Is it concerned with service to community groups as distinguished from service to individuals? Is there a film lending service in the library?

#### Contacts with the Unions

Armed with these facts and any other pertinent ones, the librarian is ready to make contacts with the unions in the community. Which ones she selects to interview first and whom she sees in each one, will depend on previous investigations. These first visits should consist of an interchange of information between the librarian and the trade unionist. Each is trying to discover a common ground for further cooperation. It cannot be emphasized too often that the librarian does not approach the union with a ready-made plan of action but merely with a loosely constructed list of suggestions as to how the library can be of service. At first perhaps none of these will strike the right note but sooner or later the unionist will recall one or another of these ideas and will call upon the librarian for help.

As a part of her voyage of discovery, the librarian should also try to uncover other community agencies that are serving labor. These agencies will not only prove useful to her in developing library service, but may also be in need of some of the services which she is in the process of developing. We have in mind university programs, private labor schools, church labor education activities, as well as other civic and community projects.

Does this seem an ambitious and bewildering undertaking? It may seem so at first when you return from your voyage laden with requests of all shapes and sizes for which you cannot readily find an answer. But the growth of the work will depend upon the success with which you dispose of each one. This does not mean that the librarian must personally meet every demand. Some questions will require introducing the unionist to another community agency. This she will arrange. Some questions will need to be referred to other departments of the library, for which again she will provide. But for most of the questions, the librarian will herself have to offer a solution. This may mean utilizing the resources of the library as already constituted or it may mean devising ways of adapting the existing resources. The ingredients which go into a successful service to trade unions are patience, imagination, and experience.

#### Book Collections in the Union Hall

Perhaps the most obvious type of service from a library to a labor group - obvious both to unions and to libraries - is that of the general book collection in union headquarters. But this is not necessarily the most important nor the most satisfactory kind of service. After experimenting with this phase of the work for the past five years, I have come to the conclusion that general collections should only be put into unions, if there is sufficient staff in the library to supervise and service the collections adequately and, if the union is in a position to do the same. What adequate supervision and servicing consists of will depend on the individual situation. At the union end, it may mean an able, conscientious volunteer or it may mean a paid education director with sufficient time to devote to the active running of the collection. At the library end, it will mean a full time professional librarian and some clerical help, and, if the work grows, some professional assistance. Unless these conditions can be met, it is my belief that union collections serve only as a token of the library's interest in labor or they act as an entering wedge into the labor movement. Therefore, unless adequate service can be rendered,

it would be better to concentrate on other ways of indicating the library's readiness to serve.

Among these are the classroom collections for unions, limited to books and pamphlets on specific topics under discussion. Here you have a captive audience, not only for the books, but for a speaker who can come to one of the sessions to tell them about their public library, about services to labor groups particularly and, if necessary, about the materials in this collection. There are many advantages to this type of activity, aside from the immediate value of the books for reading and study. Based in part upon this test of the interest of union members in books, a decision can be reached as to whether a permanent collection would be used. These direct contacts with union members and their officers often lead to demands for other types of service. One member of the class may want to pursue further some point raised by the teacher and may ask for a book or other materials on the subject. There may be others who have always wanted to become library card holders but never knew how to go about obtaining one. Another may want to obtain a list of books which will prepare him for the trip to Africa where he is being sent by his organization. There is no limit to the questions which follow from these small beginnings.

#### "Knowing the Score"

But requests for information and guidance come from other sources, too. It is interesting to discover how a reputation for "knowing the score" in the labor movement grows. The ingrained suspicion that the trade unionist has for the intellectual is most effectively broken down by fellow members of the movement. A convinced customer is your best means of spreading the word. Soon the research director for whom you have answered a number of questions tells the labor editor that he can get special help in locating some cartoons on Labor Day for his September issue. And the labor editor tells the legal adviser that the librarian in charge of the service to labor can help him in his search for data on strikes in retail trade and their effects on the public.

Once started, however, the ball will not keep rolling by itself. It is up to the librarian to be constantly devising new ways of serving the unions in the community. Recently, The New York Public Library began a film program planning service which included the lending of films dealing with the American Heritage. Among the films purchased were several on labor and many others on subjects of interest to labor. This new development was called to the attention of all labor groups where film programs might be instituted. As a result, some thirty films were loaned to some fifteen different organizations. They were used as part of a discussion program or as a feature of class activities or merely as part of a union meeting. Previously, we had been giving advice on where to get films, on what organizations might supply speakers on such topics as social security, the United Nations, or atomic power. Books, pamphlets, and discussion guides were included in some instances as part of the program.

#### Reading Lists for Unions

Although I have always advocated the reading list made to order for the individual person or the individual group, we have recently been experimenting with an annotated list, called Pointers. It was intended originally as a means of promoting reading interest in the various union libraries; but it was elaborated to serve a number of additional purposes. Among others, it serves to stimulate interest in library service to trade unions and, by listing library events, also stimulates interest in the library as a whole. This, too, should be one of the functions of the library service to labor. Unfortunately this brainchild is still too young for us to claim for it more than a promise. This much we can say, however. It has

stirred up interest in our work, not to mention interest in some of the books listed. Nor is this interest limited to our regular union members. We have received requests for items on the list as well as for the list itself from a wide variety of sources.

A more time consuming, but perhaps more specifically rewarding, activity is that of supplying annotations on individual books which are in the various collections. These annotations have been published by unions in their own papers or mimeographed for distribution or for placing on bulletin boards. Since, however, it is impossible to maintain both types of activities, we have been concentrating on Pointers, although we believe that individual annotations give more tangible evidence on circulation figures.

If time permitted, we would elaborate on the subject of exhibits in general and upon the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in particular. These are certainly most rewarding ways of keeping the library service in the minds of the trade unionist. I hope in a future issue of the News Letter to be able to point out the special significance of this Exhibition of leisure time activities of trade unionists, both for the library and for the labor movement. It is more than a publicity device. It is an important contribution to better intra-union as well as inter-union cooperation, not to speak of its value as a library-union-community service.

#### Keeping in Touch with Labor Education

There are many other types of community cooperation which we believe are also properly the function of a librarian in charge of service to trade unions. They are her function not only because they give her an opportunity of spreading the services more widely, but also because they enable her to keep in touch with trends in the field of workers' education. If possible, the labor librarian should connect with a workers' education local of the American Federation of Teachers. Here she meets many of the leading union education directors. If there is a labor education program in any of the local colleges or other organizations, she should welcome an invitation to sit in on their program planning and to participate in their activities whenever possible. Here she will learn of new plans for union educational activities. This knowledge will enable her to plan and prepare library services accordingly. In New York, the American Labor Education Service, the Extension Division of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, the Rand School, and the Labor Department of the Puerto Rican government are among the many valuable connections which we cultivate as a part of our work.

Nor do we fail to cultivate friends within the library and this is necessary not only for diplomatic reasons. By so doing, we are able to bring about a greater understanding of Labor and its needs, throughout the library system. Librarians call upon us for help in advising readers on books, in answering special labor questions, and in maintaining adequate labor collections. They ask us to participate in film forums on labor or to supply them with special materials for activities which they are carrying on for labor in their particular neighborhoods.

Have I said enough to show that a separate department has a real place and will have plenty to do? You will no doubt answer as I did in the beginning "Yes, if." If the community warrants it, if the library is so organized and oriented that it can encompass such a service, and if the person is available who has both the background and the enthusiasm to develop it. As for the last "if." It is my hope that such persons will continue to be found in the library world.



STUDY AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITY FOR LIBRARIANS SERVING LABOR

The Fund for Adult Education is offering approximately 100 awards for academic study, supervised field experience, or combinations of the two in the field of adult education. Librarians working with labor groups and workers education personnel from unions and colleges are among those eligible to apply.

The recipient of an award may spend up to one year, full-time, in association with such an adult education agency in a learning-by-doing situation. Or he or she may spend up to one full academic year on a full-time basis in a university. There may also be combinations of the two.

The individual study program is for the purpose of increasing knowledge, improving skills, and developing general competence in some aspect of adult education, which may include workers' education.

Each applicant is asked to propose the program he desires to follow under an award. The National Committee on Study Grants will consider both the individual and the proposal, but with greater weight on the individual's qualifications and his possibility of putting his training to use. The amount of the award will depend on what is considered necessary and appropriate by the Committee. Most of the awards will be made for the calendar year 1954 and the academic year 1954-55.

1 October is the deadline for applying for a study award or internship and 1 November the deadline for academic scholarship and fellowships. Send a postal card to the National Committee on Study Grants, 141 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago 4 for the necessary application forms. Librarians may wish to contact Mrs. Grace T. Stevenson, associate executive secretary of the American Library Association (50 E. Huron St., Chicago 11) for further information and advice. Mrs. Stevenson is a member of the Committee. Ralph N. Campbell, director of extension, New York School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, is chairman of the Committee.

Last year one librarian, Rebecca J. Camp of the Vermont Public Library Commission, served a traveling internship in adult education under the auspices of this Fund. Here is a real study and training opportunity for a present or potential labor librarian!